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AUTHOR McGuire, Marion
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Abstract

A questionnaire survey of reading instruction status in six New England states was part of the New England Educational Assessment Project, representing a joint effort of the six New England State Departments of Education. Questionnaires were mailed to all reading consultants; elementary principals; and kindergarten, first-, and fourth-grade teachers in the six states and to all schools housing a seventh and/or tenth grade. The following findings were reported. Activities in kindergarten programs were predominately related to listening and language-skills development. Factors used in determining a child's readiness for grade 1 ranged from teacher judgment to student intelligence. Heterogeneous self-contained classrooms of 21 to 26 students predominated at the first- and fourth-grade levels. Basal readers were the most-used materials of 94 percent of the first-grade teachers and 91 percent of fourth-grade teachers. Considerably more separate reading classes and reading texts were used in grade 7 than in grade 10, but at both grade levels, reading instruction in English classes was about equal. Most reading consultants were experienced and well-trained reading teachers. More consultant time was spent at lower-grade levels than at upper-grade levels. There was a need for development and expansion in secondary school reading programs. (CM)

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Marion L. McGuire, Ph.D.
Coordinator, Graduate Reading Center
37 Lower College Road
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, R. I. 02881

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THE NEW ENGLAND EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT READING PROJECT

Programmed under: Films and Illustrated Lectures
Friday, May 2, 9:00-10:00 a.m.
Room 400, Auditorium

The survey of reading in New England is one of a number of studies emanating from the New England Educational Assessment Project. This parent project represents a joint effort of the six New England State Departments of Education to strengthen their programs and to provide decision-making resources which they have been accomplishing by collecting data, identifying educational problems, and disseminating the findings.

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Background

The project was initiated by the Commissioners of Education of the six states. Rhode Island acts as the agent state to meet technical requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title V, under which it was funded.

Goverance of the project is entrusted to the Board of Representatives, one appointed by each Commissioner and vested with certain delegated powers.

A project director and six state directors compose the Administrative Board. The project director administers central office responsibilities, and the State Directors work to facilitate in-state and interstate studies.

The project has been highly productive. Committees have worked in the areas of:

Evaluation

Guidance

Innovative Practices

Reading

Social Studies

Staff Data

Teacher Aides

Reports have already been completed and disseminated in many of these areas; the remainder are anticipated to be ready by June 30, 1969.

The Reading Committee

The reading survey came under the aegis of this large project. Each state sent one State Department of Education consultant as a member of the committee, as follows:

Robert F. Kinder, English and Reading Consultant, Connecticut

C. Michael P. O'Donnell, Reading Supervisor, Maine

Margaret L. Droney, Senior Supervisor in Education (Reading), Mass.

Mark Kristoff, English and Reading Consultant, New Hampshire

Marion L. McGuire, Reading Consultant, Rhode Island

Madge E. Boardman, Curriculum Coordinator, Vermont

The Connecticut State Director, Joe R. Gordon, acted as committee chairman, and two consultants to the committee, Olive S. Niles, Director of Reading, Springfield, Massachusetts and John R. Pescosolido, Director of Reading and Language Arts Center, Central Connecticut State College, New Britain, Connecticut, were retained to assist in the preparation of questionnaires and reports.

In the conduct of the survey, the Reading Committee held eighteen monthly two-day working conferences between December, 1966 and October, 1968.

The Reading Survey

Separate questionnaires were mailed throughout New England to all elementary principals, and to all kindergarten, first, and fourth-grade teachers during January, 1968. Two additional questionnaires were mailed the following May, one type to all schools housing a seventh and/or tenth grade and the other to all reading consultants. The number and percent of responses are indicated in Table 1.

Viewing grades seven and ten as separate groups (they were processed separately even though the group of teachers at each level completed identical questionnaires), the seven groups surveyed responded to a total of 630 multiple-choice questions. From the data collected, items have been selected for this report and organized under four headings: Kindergarten Programs, Programs in Grades One and Four, Programs in Grades Seven and Ten, and Reading Consultant Survey.

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS TO QUESTIONNAIRES

FOR THE NEW ENGLAND SURVEY, 1967-1968

Survey Level	Number of Questionnaires Distributed	Respondents N	Respondents %
Principal (Elem.)	4,736	3,153	67
Kindergarten	3,955	2,530	64
First Grade	11,310	6,426	57
Fourth Grade	11,542	5,571	48
*Seventh Grade and Tenth Grade	1,501	849	57
*Consultants	570	124	**

*State of Vermont did not participate in this phase.
**Questionnaires were mailed to all communities, very many of which had no consultant

Kindergarten Programs

Asked for an opinion as to the greatest need of most of their kindergarten children, fifty-five percent of kindergarten teachers responded: "developing good listening skills." Other responses included: developing the ability to follow directions - 20 percent; developing adequate oral language patterns - 15 percent; and learning to work and play with other children - 8 percent.

The least frequently selected choice, learning to work and play with other children, may point up an interesting change in the philosophy of kindergarten education. It is not long since many educators thought of kindergarten as a socializing experience, a viewpoint which would have rated this choice relatively higher in importance.

As sort of a cross-check on what kindergarten teachers think children need compared to what teachers actually do, a question was asked about activities. They reported giving much emphasis to these activities listed in rank order: listening to stories, discussing pictures, vocabulary building, listening games, using visual aids, learning letter names, and language-experience stories. In this listing, priority seems to be given to listening skills and language development, followed by other reading readiness activities. Programs correlate closely with needs as teachers see them.

At the end of the kindergarten program, teachers are frequently faced with the job of evaluating each child's readiness for grade one. The respondents were asked which factors were used in making this determination. The responses "very important" and "important" when combined fell in this rank order: kindergarten teacher judgment, social maturity, readiness test, chronological age, language ability, attendance record, and intelligence test. Teacher judgment was selected as "very important" or "important" by over ninety percent of the teachers; the remaining above-ranked factors are indicators of what else besides teacher judgment carries weight in the evaluation task.

How do teachers describe the children retained in kindergarten? Given twelve choices, half of them checked "short attention span." Next in importance were "socially immature" and "low readiness test score." About one-fourth of the teachers selected each of the following: poor visual discrimination, low level of intelligence, poor auditory discrimination, chronologically young, poor speech patterns, and little or no motivation. Although teachers were asked to select four of the twelve descriptors, less than ten percent chose one of the following: irregular attendance, no sight vocabulary, or physically small.

In view of the fact that kindergarten is not compulsory, it was surprising to note that a policy of kindergarten retention was rather widespread. Forty-four percent of the respondents reported that they were repeating one to three children in kindergarten at the time of the survey, eleven percent were retaining four or more, and seventeen percent reported the presence of a transition class. In contrast, thirteen percent indicated that, as a matter of policy, the school did not retain children in kindergarten. Most of the remainder could retain but were not retaining any children at that time.

Programs in Grades One and Four.

Questions were asked about organization, class size, and library services because the committee felt that these factors affect the kind of program that can be offered. The following data were gathered:

Organization for reading. Principals reported that approximately three-fourths of the primary segments and just over one-half of the intermediate segments were organized into self-contained classrooms, while an additional eleven percent of the former and fourteen percent of the latter segments regroup within grade levels for reading. Departmentalization and across-grade grouping, having found only token acceptance at the primary level, are more common in grades four through six. About five percent of schools are nongraded at either level.

Principals were questioned as to how self-contained classrooms were grouped. Less than one-fourth reported homogeneous grouping, although more than two-thirds of the schools had nine or more classrooms. Regardless of grouping, over ninety percent of first and fourth

grade teachers described the reading needs of their classes as "average" or "very broad."

Class size. At the kindergarten level, seventeen percent of the classes fell in the "fewer than twenty" category and, at the other extreme, sixteen percent fell in the "more than thirty" category. The median fell in the twenty-one to twenty-six range.

Forty-eight percent of first grade classes and thirty-eight percent of fourth grade classes contained fewer than twenty-six. The median at both grade levels fell in the twenty-six to thirty range. Data revealed the tendency for class size to increase as grade level increased.

Library services. The survey of library services included questions about facilities, staffing, and activities. Elementary principals responded as to the availability of facilities, as follows: central library - 62%, classroom collections - 68%, public library accessible - 65%, and mobile library visits - 16%.

Twenty-three percent of the principals reported that central library and classroom collections combined had reached or exceeded eleven volumes per child.

Staffing has an important bearing on the usefulness of the library. From the 3,139 principals who responded to this question, the following data were gathered: full-time librarian - 8%, part-time librarian - 27%, full-time staffing by other adults - 9%, and part-time staffing by other adults - 32%. Since central libraries were reported to be in only sixty-two percent of the schools, it must be assumed that there was a certain amount of overlap in staffing by librarians and other adults.

The activities questioned were in the areas of skills instruction and student use of the library. All but one percent of the librarians

available at the elementary level taught library skills; and, in sixty-four percent of schools, students used a library facility during school hours.

Reading programs. On the first-grade level, basal readers and phonics instruction were each emphasized by ninety-four percent of teachers. In nearly three-fourths of the schools the manual of the basal reader was used as the curriculum guide.

It was noted that first-grade teachers tended to take all children through a readiness program regardless of need. Differentiation was provided through pacing rather than through choice of materials or activities.

At the fourth-grade level, silent reading and vocabulary were among the skills that received little emphasis, and locational skills were taught more frequently than other study skills.

Basal readers continued to be the most-used materials at the fourth-grade level, although the percentage of teachers giving them "much" use dropped from ninety-four to ninety-one. Commercial workbooks, trade books, and supplementary basals were used in some way by more than half of the teachers, but five other types of materials -- namely, kits, periodicals, phonics, programmed, and teacher-made materials -- received much use by a minority of teachers.

Programs in Grades Seven and Ten

On the basis of a preliminary survey accomplished during May, 1967, seven and ten were selected as the grade levels for the secondary school study. The group of teachers responsible for conducting the reading program at each grade level was requested to complete one instrument jointly.

Reading at the secondary level was found to be taught in one of three ways: 1) in separate classes, 2) in English classes, and 3) in content area classes other than English.

At the seventh-grade level, nearly half of the schools offered reading to all or most of the students in separate classes. Another thirty percent taught reading to all or most of the students in English classes. In contrast, all or most of the students at the tenth-grade level received reading instruction in English classes in about twenty-six percent of schools. Other arrangements were used in a minority of cases.

Comparing data collected at seventh- and tenth-grade levels, it was found that at the seventh grade level more separate reading classes were held and more reading texts and workbooks were used. On the other hand, at the tenth-grade level, more programs were conducted for the college bound and better library facilities were provided. At both levels, reading instruction in English classes was about equal.

It was obvious to the committee conducting this study that there is room for development in secondary school reading programs. It was found that a majority of these programs lack: 1) an up-to-date curriculum guide, 2) adequate consultant services, 3) integration with content area classes, and 4) adequate staffing.

Reading Consultant Survey

For the purposes of this survey, a consultant was defined as a person who spends fifty percent or more of his time in supervising or consulting with teachers or working with administrators on matters concerning the teaching of reading.

Twenty-five percent of the consultants who responded were full-time supervisors. Twenty percent spent most of their time in consultant work and the rest of their time teaching reading or diagnosing pupils' reading abilities. Another twenty-eight percent split their time about evenly between working with teachers and students. The remainder spent fifty percent of their time working in an area other than reading.

Questions concerning the background of reading consultants elicited data which indicate that they are experienced teachers and well trained in the teaching of reading. The majority of consultants were found to have: 1) thirteen or more years of teaching experience, 2) elementary classroom experience, 3) six or fewer years of consultant experience, 4) a master's degree or better, 5) more than twenty-one credits in reading, and 6) a course in reading within the last three years.

Little was known about the role of the reading consultant in New England's public schools. To shed light in this area, information was sought about what the consultants were doing in the classroom and outside the classroom when working with teachers and administrators. Data indicated that, when working in the classroom, they gave much emphasis to the following activities listed in descending rank order: 1) diagnosing pupils and establishing groups, 2) observing teachers and offering assistance, 3) teaching demonstration lessons, 4) conferring with teachers about remedial pupils, and 5) observing teachers to evaluate them.

In similar rank order, the activities given much emphasis outside the classroom were: 1) discussing the reading program, 2) planning new programs, 3) evaluating the program, 4) conducting in-service programs, and 5) planning orientation programs.

More consultant time was found to be spent at lower-grade levels than at upper-grade levels. To extend the benefits of this kind of assistance to teachers at the secondary level, it was recommended by the committee that more staff be added to service secondary teachers and that responsibilities include those suggested in the International Reading Association's statement of roles.

The complete report of Reading Instruction in New England's Public Schools as prepared by the New England Educational Assessment Project is available through ERIC Document Reproduction Service.